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SUBJECT: PFP REACTIONS UPDATE - GOS Private Reactions

REF: BELGRADE 1943

1. (SBU) The Ambassador spoke on November 29 with President Tadic, FONMIN Draskovic, and DEFMIN Stankovic. PM Kostunica returned the Ambassador's call on November 30. The Ambassador congratulated his interlocutors, noting the Secretary's efforts to forge consensus on the issue. He said NATO and the USG would now be looking for an energetic and positive response to this gesture of goodwill towards Serbia -- including unstinting efforts to complete ICTY cooperation and continue on the path of defense reform. He also expressed disappointment at the GoS official statement and its inaccurate linkage of Pfp and Kosovo status.

2. (SBU) President Tadic welcomed the Pfp invitation and reassured the Ambassador that full ICTY cooperation remained a top priority for him and his party. He echoed the Ambassador's disappointment over the official GoS response. Tadic said he was committed to finalizing the appointment of reformist Genral Zdravko Ponos as the Serbian Chief of the General Staff, noting he had sent a formal letter to DEFMIN Stankovic instructing him to forward the appointment paperwork. Tadic said he was committed to doing everything in his power "within the limits of the law" to make the appointment happen. DEFMIN Stankovic, in his call, thanked the USG for helping move the Pfp issue forward and avowed to the Ambassador that Ponos' appointment would be "no problem."

3. (SBU) Draskovic also welcomed the decision, and agreed that it was improper for the GoS to formally link the Pfp offer to Kosovo status. Draskovic said he would appreciate a public acknowledgement from NATO and the USG of his role in moving the Pfp debate forward, noting his long commitment to Pfp as a tool for apprehending Mladic and strengthening reformers in Serbia. The Ambassador said we would look for an opportunity to recognize his contributions in an appropriate manner.

4. (SBU) Kostunica pointedly reiterated his interpretation of the Pfp offer as NATO acknowledgement of Serbian territorial integrity including Kosovo. He also stressed that the Alliance decision meant that its policy of conditions had failed. Kostunica hoped that now NATO members and partners of Serbia would work with Serbia to prevent imposition of Kosovo independence. The Ambassador warned the PM against misinterpretation of this important U.S./NATO gesture. This was an offer of partnership and integration along with the expectation that the gesture would be reciprocated by Serbia's democratic leaders in a renewed commitment to constructive and realistic relations. U.S. policy on Kosovo, the Ambassador noted, had not changed. The PM and the Ambassador agreed to meet in person the week of December 4 for further discussion.

5. (SBU) Meanwhile, all Belgrade media were dominated November 30 by the Pfp decision. As reported reftel, PM Kostunica commented publicly along the lines of his conversation with the Ambassador that "as member of Pfp, we are much more secure that the integrity

of Serbia will be preserved and that Kosovo and Metohija will remain in Serbia with the appropriate...and essential autonomy." The PM also said that "conditionality is not the way to enter into integrations, whether it is PFP or the EU."

16. (SBU) According to press reports, ICTY chief prosecutor Carla del Ponte attacked NATO's decision as a reward for non-compliance with the ICTY. The Embassy received messages from human rights NGOs, including especially those dedicated to war crimes issues, that they were upset by NATO's sudden change of position. SRS, meanwhile, has been uncharacteristically silent on the PFP issue, focusing instead on Seselj's hunger strike. SPS has made noises about the need for a referendum on PFP, but that appears unlikely.

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